

The amended regulations as to the organization, inspection, and examination of public schools arrange the pupils in three divisions—the Preparatory Division, the Junior Division, comprising Standards I, II, and the Senior Division, Standards III, IV, V, VI. As the syllabus is drawn up in accordance with these divisions the effect is to indicate the best method of grouping classes, and to afford more latitude in drawing up schemes of work, in that these may be adapted to the classes as combined. In English, more especially in reading, especial advantage is conferred upon sole teachers and others, who each have more than one class to teach, practically enabling them for the purposes of instruction to reduce the number of classes by half.

*Reading.*—The use of at least three reading-books in each year is now required by classes in the Senior Division, two being the minimum for the Junior Division. The latter requirement has already been fully met in this district, but the former usually only in the larger schools. The “Pacific Reader,” the *School Journal*, and a continuous or story reader have been the ones most commonly chosen. Some few schools have used the continuous readers with good effect, the interest in the story affording a stimulus to the mental activities of the children. The advantages bestowed by well-graded miscellaneous readers as affording well-defined aids to classification and supplying greater variety of diction are, contrary to the expressed desire of the Inspectors, too much underrated in the new syllabus. We consider that all the higher-grade schools should retain a series in use. Though in reading little fault can be found with the pronunciation, fluency, and naturalness of tone, there is still something to be desired in expression, force, and appreciation of the passage read. During the written examinations for Standard VI proficiency certificates the comprehension was tested from the meanings assigned to some dozen familiar words selected from the reading-books. We were often astonished at the wildness of some answers that came under review.

*Recitation.*—The recitation in our estimation attained a higher level than the reading, thirty schools being marked “good” in all classes, and yet one is disappointed ever to find the rendering tame or spiritless, the matter failing to interest, to awaken the child’s sympathies, to uplift the mind, in fancy raising it above the commonplace to explore the realms of romance and imagination, with all the wealth of poetic diction resounding to the music of the human voice. Though our little nation is at present in the throes of agitation over the exclusion of “the Book of Books” from our schools, we know that our teachers aim to impart a high moral training. Character-building is the main ideal of the educationist. May the teacher then more fully realize what powerful levers for moral uplifting are placed in his hands by such subjects as history, reading, and especially recitation.

*Writing.*—This, though rarely unsatisfactory, seldom attained a very high standard, only thirteen schools receiving commendation for specially good work. Collins’ New Graphic copy-books are still everywhere in use, though Vere Foster’s Medium series has some advantages in the more systematic formation of junctions and proportionate heights of letters, and its use would probably tend to produce more fluent hand-writing. The most common failing at present is irregularity of slope, many children finding the greatest difficulty in maintaining uniformity in the direction of down strokes. The latter series of copy-books is in general use in the other educational districts, and has been introduced into some private schools here. Writing with the pen has hitherto been generally practised in Standards I and II, and in some few of the larger schools in which writing is a specialty the children in the highest preparatory class (usually over seven years of age) have also been introduced to the use of ink. Writing with a pen need not now be required from the Junior Division (Standards I and II), nor should precise accuracy of form be insisted upon so long as neatness and legibility are secured. Precise accuracy has certainly not been attained in Standard I, nor should it be expected, but good work has been frequently encountered in Standard II. The postponement of the initial stage of accustoming the child to the use of pen and ink will throw the main burden of giving instruction in writing upon the teachers of Standards III and IV.

*Spelling.*—Spelling shows more variation than any other branch of English, more schools proving unsatisfactory, and still more, forty-three in all, gaining commendation for good work. Seven of these were classed as excellent for obtaining an average of over 80 per cent. of marks. Except in Standard VI, where the passage for dictation has been previously unseen, the dictation and spelling exercises selected by us have been from the book studied by the class. The restriction as to the use of one book is now removed, and the need for systematic word-building and the study of the word in relation to its context are emphasized. The Oxford English Dictionary is to be the recognized authority, but the recommendation that the phonetic form of the word should be preferred would, in the general opinion, be honoured “more in the breach than in the observance.” This clause marks the first stage in the introduction of a spelling reform.

*Composition.*—This was generally very satisfactory, and twenty-eight schools were commended for the good quality of the papers submitted to us by every class, yet in many respects there is room for improvement. In judging the written papers of the upper-standard children we have placed equal value upon the questions set and the essay or story. In the Sixth, where the pupil usually scored higher marks in the latter, he is placed at some disadvantage when compared with a pupil in another district where the Inspector may assign double value to the essay or story. Though the cards supplied by the Department are exceedingly useful and help to maintain a high standard, some slight alterations would be of advantage. No knowledge of archaic or obsolete forms should be expected. Any child of fourteen who obtains a fair working knowledge of English as written and spoken to-day does well, and it is somewhat unfair to the particular child who is asked for more, as we do not pick or discriminate between different cards. Each one set should provide a fair test for any child of that standard. The fact that three answers are required under each of three subheadings, a triple nest of tubs, places too great a complication before the child mind. Latin roots and their meanings should not be expected—in fact, it is doubtful whether